

Marcia Rosen



Murder at the
Zoo

An Agatha, Raymond, Sherlock, and Me Mystery

Advance Praise for *Murder at the Zoo*

“Marcia Rosen’s new book is hard to put down! The characters are engaging and you enjoy getting to know them as you read this mystery. I enjoyed discovering the world and people in *Murder at the Zoo* and can’t wait to read more from this author!”

~ Cat Harper, National Steinbeck Center

“A delightful and charming new series filled with twists and turns, unexpected events and wonderful characters including several dead authors!”

~ Elizabeth Cooke, award-winning author of 21 books.

“This book will keep you turning the pages as you unravel the many threads leading to a solution. Eccentric characters, a little romance, and a lot of mystery make this book one you will not put down.”

~ Terry Lucas, Director, Shelter Island Library

“*Murder at the Zoo*, an Agatha, Raymond, Sherlock, and Me Mystery is a wonderful fantasy for mystery lovers. Rosen has brilliantly allowed us to experience the wisdom and humor of earlier writers as advisors to Miranda and help her solve the exciting *Murder at the Zoo!*”

~ Susann Thon, Past Vice President, Central Coast Writers

“I really enjoyed *Murder at the Zoo* and the adventures of Miranda and her special friends.”

~ Michael Campeta, author of three mysteries

“Love the storyline and characters, not to mention a host of my favorite mystery authors and sleuths.”

~ Sharon Tucker, co-author, *Discreet Detectives*

“If you love murder mysteries and animals, you’ll be captivated by Marcia Rosen’s latest book. Get ready to stay up late because you won’t be able to put this one down!”

~ Elizabeth Belasco, Ghostwriter

“A great read sure to satisfy Ms. Rosen’s mystery fans. They’ll be wanting more before this first book in the series ends!”

~ Leah Rubin, Editor, *Your Second Pen*

“Such thrills in the first few sentences! And what a crime scene—the zoo!”

~ Mary Jo McDonough, International Project Writer

**An Agatha, Raymond, Sherlock, and Me
Mystery**

Murder *at the*
ZOO

By

Marcia Rosen



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Prologue

“HURRY UP! HELP ME push the body over the fence. The animals will eat him.”

It was 3 a.m. and theirs were the only human sounds.

“I think I’m going to be sick.”

“Well, do it on your own time. I said hurry up and help me. Now!”

The body landed with a thud.

Eager animals slowly circled the unusual meal.

Chapter One

Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!

“GET TO THE ZOO! Visitors are pointing at a human arm in the lions’ enclosure!”

Miranda could feel the panic in the voicemail she had retrieved from Emma, just as she was setting out for the early morning drive from Taos to Albuquerque.

“Hmmm. This is intriguing. A body in the lions’ den. Agatha, Raymond, facts if you please,” Sherlock demanded in his crisp and stately British manner, immediately taking charge of the case.

“Shut up!” Miranda had no time for this now. She wanted to clear her mind and be ready for what awaited her at the zoo.

It was not the first time she had shouted to one or more of the voices in her head. Sometimes they seemed so real to her. She had read nearly every book of every famous mystery writer and had seen movies made from them many times and was often absorbed and obsessed by the stories and the characters. And she loved their ways of thinking, analyzing problems, finding solutions, and delving into the dark spaces hidden in humanity.

There was Raymond Chandler’s tough Detective, Philip Marlowe, who always found a dame he could lust after and distrust. He spoke to his fellow crime solvers

with that ever-present chain smoker's gravel in his voice. Agatha Christie was the voice behind Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple and, of course, her Tommy and Tuppence. Their gossip and ways of finding clues and uncovering secrets swirled in her head. The famous Sherlock Homes always took charge, demanding facts and attention to the tiniest of details.

There were other geniuses of mysteries who stopped by to give Miranda their "two cents" at times. Especially when Agatha, Raymond, and Sherlock were disagreeing with each other.

Miranda was sure they would have plenty to say about a murder at the zoo but wasn't ready to hear their theories just yet. Determined to silence those voices for now, she called the zoo's Curator, Emma Parker (no relation to the mystery writer, Robert B. Parker).

"Just left the ranch and the crazy lady. See you in a few hours. I'm on the road with my pal Willie Nelson singing to me."

"Give him my love, drive safe, but hurry up. It is insane here. The police are all over the zoo property, the press is chomping at the bit to get in, and the animals are pacing, sensing the tension here." Emma was trying to sound matter-of-fact, but the urgency was clear in her response.

Emma and Miranda had been good friends almost from the moment they met. They both loved working with animals. And they enjoyed watching murder mysteries, once joking with a colleague at the zoo who resisted their invitation to join them, "Hey! Everyone needs a hobby. We like murders...sort of."

"Why are you talking to yourself?" Emma asked Miranda one night when they were watching *Midsomer Murders* on television.

"What?"

“Miranda, you’re talking to yourself.”

Caught!

Embarrassed, Miranda felt forced to admit to Emma about the famous mystery writers who she described as “living in my head.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Nope.”

Emma couldn’t stop laughing. “Don’t you think this is a bit eccentric? Or at least odd?”

“Emma, you better swear on your dog and two cats you’ll never tell anyone. I know it’s odd, but it just happens. It has for years. All those mysteries I read are now dancing in my head. Or maybe it’s possible I’ve lost my marbles.”

Miranda really didn’t believe that. She knew that the voices of her adolescent heroes from books and movies were her own thoughts—a second conscious perhaps—that helped her sort things out with the same critical thinking skills that had been used by her “detectives” when solving cases. She hardly saw herself as a detective. She loved being a veterinarian who was about to be thrown into the middle of more than one murder at the zoo.

Miranda’s ride back to Albuquerque was along a dry road with trees and plants native to the area that looked as if they had been hung, their heads bent over staring at the ground as animals skittered about looking for food and the scarce water. None of their thirsts would soon be satisfied.

The early morning New Mexico sky changes from season to season. Colder mornings changed to warmer days and hotter ones in the summer. In October, the balloon fi-

esta colors the clear sky as close to a million guests share in its party.

This was *not* one of those clear days; dark clouds hovered as Miranda drove the nearly three hours to the zoo wondering what had really happened and whose body parts were found in the lions' enclosure.

Normally, she loved the drive to Albuquerque and the open road leading her away from a visit with her mother, who still lived on a small ranch north of Taos. Miranda had lived there until she was 12. When her parents divorced, she had chosen to live with her father in Albuquerque. She had told her, "Love you, mom, but I want to live in the city and go to school with people, not cows and chickens."

Initially, her mother had been upset by Miranda's move. But Lillian Scott soon realized she now had the freedom to do whatever she wanted without prying eyes.

The truth was, Miranda had always preferred being with her father. He had interesting friends. He was generous with money. He was a good father. He raised her to have strong values and make good decisions. He gave her the freedom to make mistakes, but was always there to protect her from being a rebellious teenager. He gave her a comfortable home to live in without the constant chaos and arguing that had existed when around her mother. More important than anything, he gave her the love that Lillian Scott had never been able to provide for anyone but herself.

Over the years she had become aware that her father was once involved in illegal activities, but it was left unsaid between them. One day soon, she would discover what kind of man he was or, perhaps, was not.

As she left the road from the ranch, it always felt as if memories had seeped into the land—her memories and those of others from years past.

Author D. H. Lawrence had once owned a large ranch a little farther north of her family home. Shut down long ago, a fence now blocked the curious from getting too close. And there was the Mabel Dodge Luhan house, built not far from Taos, continuing to welcome visitors. When Luhan lived there, the likes of Georgia O’Keeffe and D. H. Lawrence visited taking part in fascinating salon conversations.

The Luhan house was still a center for writers, artists, educators, and especially dreamers who came to find their voices and their truths, perhaps hoping residents of the past would somehow have a positive effect on their futures.

Miranda quickly maneuvered the familiar twists and turns of the highway around Santa Fe, avoiding the city’s traffic. By now, she was more than anxious to get to the zoo in Albuquerque. She wanted to be sure the animals had not been harmed. As the zoo’s senior veterinarian, they were her responsibility.

“So sorry to interrupt you, my dear. But shouldn’t you be planning for what needs to be done when you arrive at the zoo?” Agatha said this with both authority and kindness, all at the same time.

Without a pause, Raymond jumped in with his throaty thoughts. *“Why would someone try to get rid of a body at a zoo? There’s tons of other ways to do that without causing so much attention.”*

“Precisely. And why your zoo, Miranda? Could this have something to do with your father?” Sherlock’s inquiries were always more direct and invasive. His mind was always moving five steps ahead, as he attempted to orchestrate the investigation.

“Please be quiet!” Miranda yelled. “I don’t know anything yet. And why would my father have anything to do

with this? We'll know more when we get there. We do know this wasn't a childish prank. A man was killed at my zoo and it's damn unnerving to say the least!"

At age thirty-six, Dr. Miranda Scott had been a zoo veterinarian for nearly ten years and the Senior Veterinarian the past three. Intelligent, five foot, six inches tall, and slender with long dark hair and green eyes, she had been told she was attractive ever since she was a teenager.

Detective Bryan Anderson, one of Albuquerque's finest, agreed. He had been asking her out for a long time. So did her mother, who was relentless in wanting to know, "When are you going to get married and give me grandchildren instead of puppies, kittens, and baby goats?"

"I'm thinking about it. I'm even sort of engaged to Dennis Hayes. You met him a couple times. You said you liked him when I told you he worked with a big law firm."

"What does 'sort of' engaged mean?" her mother yelled. She was a great shouter.

"Dating and even sleeping with him occasionally is a convenience. Marriage to him sounds like a burden." She could still hear her mother give out a long-suffering sigh.

Originally, Miranda had planned to stop on the way to Albuquerque at the Southwest Animal Rescue and Retirement Center, on land donated by a rancher who loved animals. They treated and cared for wounded, abused, and abandoned animals—some brought to them and, all too often, some dumped at the entrance to the center. It was located on 25 acres of land north of Albuquerque, and Miranda volunteered twice a month and was often called in to handle emergencies.

It was also a place where pets, mostly dogs and cats,

whose owners could no longer take care of them due to age or illness, could come to live out the rest of their lives. The owners, grateful their beloved pets would have a loving and caring home, gave generous donations to help support the center.

However, there would be no stopping at the Center today. The shocking circumstances at the zoo took precedence.

As the drive grew shorter, the voices in her head began their chatter once again. Miranda, reaching the Albuquerque city limits, called Emma to drown them out. "I'm almost there. Try to keep the press away."

"The police, including your buddy, Detective Anderson, are very anxious we get that arm out of the habitat. I assume you've been having some interesting conversations with Agatha and others on your way here?"

"I'm hanging up on you now."

Emma Taylor, six years older than Miranda, was the zoo curator and her boss. She suffered no nonsense from anyone. Not the police, and certainly not the press when it came to protecting the zoo's residents.

This was not the first incident at this or other zoos. There were teens who threw rocks at animals and others who tried to feed them harmful foods. Miranda's "favorites" were the kids who climbed over fences so they could pet the nice lions or tigers or bears.

Her famous voices would literally scream. "*Where are their parents?*" In fact, they were now chiming in with their last-minute instructions on how to deal with this current shocking event.

"*Miranda, dear, don't let more than one person into the cage, or the evidence will be compromised,*" offered Agatha.

"*Get to that arm before the coppers!*" shouted Raymond.

Sherlock added, *“I can’t stop wondering why this happened at your zoo and not somewhere else. Observe even the most minute detail—no matter how slight.”* You could almost hear the draw on his pipe if you pictured him sitting in the leather chair in his study.

Chapter Two

The Scene of the Crime

MIRANDA TURNED ONTO RIO Grande Boulevard, then onto 10th Street and into the zoo's parking area for staff. The zoo had opened at 9 a.m. as usual. But within forty-five minutes the gruesome discovery had been made. The police were called and the zoo was closed immediately. The area of the crime scene was cordoned off, and everyone on the grounds who were not staff were escorted out with a free pass for a future visit.

As Miranda drove in to the employee parking lot, she saw police cars and members of the press filled almost a dozen parking spaces. When the press saw Miranda pulling into her parking spot, they began shouting questions at her.

Miranda slammed the door of her car, not that it would help anything. Ignoring everyone else, she spent ten minutes with Emma and several staff members determining the best way to get the arm out of the lions' habitat.

She directed her comments to John Lynch. He was the lead lionkeeper and knew best how to get the lions into their indoor enclosure.

"Once they are in their indoor area, I need you to collect the arm quickly so we can make sure it didn't do any harm to the lions."

Everyone was silent as he entered the lions' enclosure. Only a few clicks of some press photographers' cameras were heard. The tension was palpable as John coaxed the lions through the gate. Once the lions were inside John placed the arm and a few small un-chewed pieces of the body in an evidence bag the police had provided him. Forensics entered the enclosure to start checking for fingerprints, blood, and anything that might give them clues as to who had tossed the body into the lions den so callously and cruelly.

Miranda grabbed the bag from John the moment he exited from the cage.

"Dr. Scott! Give that to me or I swear I'll throw you in jail!" The shouting came from Detective Bryan Anderson's very unpleasant partner, Thomas Wilson, who clearly did not appreciate Miranda or her actions.

This was not their first encounter. Nor was it bound to be their last.

"I need photos of this to make sure the lions have not been harmed by this meal and I can't wait for you to give it back to me. Go ahead, take me to jail! But first, I'll gladly throw you to the lions and you can check things out for yourself!"

There were teeth marks where the lion had bitten off what was certainly a man's left arm. He had a large ring on his pinkie finger and a tattoo on his wrist. Miranda was sure she had seen a tattoo like that before. She just couldn't remember where. At this point, it was assumed the rest of the body had been consumed.

It would have been impossible for someone to climb into the cage on their own. The barbed-wire barriers at the top of the enclosure were designed to keep the lions in and thrill-seekers out. Two people might have been able to toss the body into the den but only if he was already

dead. Questions swirled inside Miranda's head, along with her special voices. But it was the tattoo she had seen that was already weighing heavily on her mind.

After taking a dozen photos of her own, she deliberately began to walk away with the arm. She loved annoying Detective Wilson.

"The bag with the arm. Now!" Wilson shouted at Miranda.

Bryan grinned at Miranda's nerve.

In response to Wilson's bullying, she tossed the bag in the air for him to catch. He was so stunned, he didn't know what to say—a rare moment for Wilson. He barely caught the bag and then stormed out of the area to the parking lot.

"Now dear, you know you need to call Jacob as soon as possible to find out what they might know about the tattoo. He'll get in touch with your father and they'll probably know why you recognize it."

Raymond snarled. *"Agatha, sometime you talk too damn much."*

"Raymond, my dear, you've used that line too many times. I fear it is a bit uncouth."

Sherlock snapped. *"Will you both be quiet so I can consider the evidence?"*

"All of you, please be quiet!" Miranda whispered to herself.

Emma looked at her and tried to suppress a grin. "Meet me in my office. We need to figure out what to do about visitors and ramping up security. George, John, and the other staff members who helped us arrange to get the arm, you also need to join us."

George Perez, Chief of Security for the zoo for many years, had been two years ahead of Miranda in high school. When he first came to work at the Zoo, they both laughed

and agreed, “Albuquerque really is one big, small town.”

Agatha spoke again. *“Miranda dear, I don’t know why you keep telling us to be quiet. There has been a horrible death here which needs to be investigated. We’re some of the best minds available to you and I really think you should consider listening to us.”*

“It’s murder obviously. Doubt anyone jumped in to join the lions on purpose.”

“Raymond, you really are always so colorful. Remember, you can’t assume anything.”

“You two need to wait until we examine the evidence. We cannot deduce the cause of death until we have all the facts. I agree with Miranda. Be quiet,” Sherlock repeated, yet again, in his iciest voice.

“Of course we need facts. We need to look at the photos of the arm. Where have we all seen that tattoo before?” questioned Agatha.

Within ten minutes, Wilson was back and barged into the staff meeting shouting and acting like the bully he was. “We need to interview all of you. Now!” Completely opposite from his partner, he was becoming more and more like a caricature of a Keystone Cop than the law enforcement officer he had been trained to be.

Emma took charge. “We can go to the café. There’s more room there.” She was not about to let Wilson push her around. Leading the way for the two detectives and a couple police officers, Emma noticed Miranda was on her cell phone.

“Jacob, I need to talk to you. There’s been a murder at the zoo.”

Nice having a gangster on speed dial. No one could argue about that.